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S E C R E T SECTION 01 OF 02 RANGOON 000215

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TAGS: PGOV PREL PHUM BM
SUBJECT: BURMA: RUMORED MILITARY RESHUFFLING

REF: A. IIR 6 812 0066 09/BURMA
1B. IIR 6 812 0071 09/BURMA

Classified By: Poloff Sean O'Neill for Reasons 1.4 (b) & (d)

Summary

11. (S/NF) Summary. State Peace and Development Council (SPDC) Secretary One Tin Aung Myint Oo was promoted to full General in late March and may also have been named "Military Advisor to the Senior General," according to a P/E contact. While state media began to refer to him as "General" on March 26, the GOB has yet to mention his possible new position. A DAO contact separately reported that the Director of Military Security Affairs Ye Myint will convert to become the civilian "governor" of Kachin State following the 2010 elections. Another DAO contact reported that Major General Ohn Myint, commander of the Bureau of Special Operations (BSO) 1, has been removed from his position on corruption charges and that Lieutenant General Tha Aye of BSO-4, and Lieutenant General Khin Zaw of BSO-6 have swapped positions. We have heard rumors that Prime Minister Thein Sein is ill, but our DATT reports he appeared healthy and alert when she last saw him in Nay Pyi Taw on March 27. End Summary.

Moving on Up: Tin Aung Myint Oo Promoted

12. (S/NF) On March 25, a Thai Embassy FSN claimed to have seen a military order dated March 24 promoting SPDC Secretary One and Quartermaster General Tin Aung Myint Oo from Lieutenant General to full General and naming him "Military Advisor to the Senior General." Since then we have confirmed that Tin Aung Myint Oo was promoted to the rank of General (Ref A), but have not confirmed if he was named to the advisor position. While state media continues to refer to him as Secretary One and began to refer to him as "General" on March 26, the GOB has made no mention of his possible new position as military advisor to Than Shwe or discussed if he would step down as Quartermaster General as a result. A DAO liaison with Military Security Affairs (MSA) told our DATT he expects a new Quartermaster General would be appointed, but did not specify when. He also suggested that the Military Advisor position may be linked to the Prime Minister's job,

but stopped short of saying that Tin Aung Myint Oo is being groomed for the PM slot (see para 4). (Note: the Thai FSN who originally reported this information appears to have good working-level contacts within the GOB and has accurately reported similar changes to us in the past).

¶3. (C) We believe the last person to hold the position of Military Advisor to the Senior General was Khin Nyunt, who held the job concurrently with his role as Prime Minister and Chief of Military Intelligence. Since Khin Nyunt's arrest in 2004, we have not seen any mention of the military advisor position.

PM Thein Sein's Health

¶4. (C) Recently we have heard rumors that Prime Minister Thein Sein is ill and may soon step down as a result. However, DAO reports he appeared healthy and alert when our DATT last saw him in Nay Pyi Taw on March 27. We note that similar rumors of Senior General Than Shwe's health and even death have circulated regularly for the past couple of years.

While the Senior General appears to have had back pains in January, all recent sightings indicate he is now in good shape. As always, we remain vigilant for information regarding the health of Burma's senior officials.

Governor Ye Myint?

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¶5. (S/NF) A foreign defense attache with good contacts within the Burmese military told DAO that the Chief of MSA (Burma's military intelligence agency) Lieutenant General Ye Myint would step down to take the post of "Governor" of Kachin State after the 2010 elections (Ref B). (Note: This contact was likely referring to the position of state or regional "Chief Minister" as described in the new constitution. In addition to state and regional legislatures, the constitution describes new state and regional "Governments" which are to carry out executive authority with "Chief Ministers" and subordinate ministers selected by the Union President. The exact language is somewhat ambiguous. End Note)

Other Rumored Changes

¶6. (S/NF) Another foreign defense attache recently told DAO that Major General Ohn Myint, commander of the Bureau of Special Operations (BSO) 1, has been removed from his position on corruption charges. The attache also stated that Lieutenant General Tha Aye, BSO-4 and Lieutenant General Khin Zaw, BSO-6 have swapped positions. According to this contact, these shifts occurred the week of March 30. We are seeking independent confirmation of this information.

¶7. (SBU) The Bureau of Special Operations positions are operational commands that cover specific geographic regions. The duties of a BSO commander are not well defined and vary depending on factors such as location and the stature of the incumbent. BSOs sometimes cover more territory than the regional commands, although some BSO commanders are considered less powerful than their regional commander counterparts.

Comment

¶8. (C) Periodic reshuffling of military responsibilities is nothing new and thus far has not led to significant substantive change in the regime's behavior. We continue to follow such moves - real or rumored - with interest because of the potential for substantive change. While the rumor of Ye Myint's possible move into civilian governance has not

been confirmed, it is the first time we have heard talk of a current member of the military regime being groomed for a regional - rather than national - post in the new government.

Given Ye Myint's Lieutenant General stature and experience in internal security, the move, if true, would indicate a particular desire by the regime to keep a tight rein on key regions of potential discontent like Kachin State.

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